

HR

WSD Personnel
Washington State
Employee
Assistance
Program

FrontLine Supervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

Toll Free 877.313.4455

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■ **When I write a corrective memo, I always include the EAP as a resource. Some employees act on these letters, visit the EAP, and correct performance quickly. Others ignore them. How do I help employees take these memos more seriously?**

Employees who respond to corrective memos by contacting the EAP and those who don't are motivated by different things. Although most employees rapidly see the need to respond to a supervisor's request for changes or improved performance, other employees need more help to do so. A memorandum will be more effective if it succeeds in keeping its message uppermost in employees' minds. Include a specific place, date, and time for a follow-up meeting. A follow-up date and place captures the imagination and creates a sense of urgency. It also ensures employees receive feedback concerning performance expectations, which may include validation of improvement or continued focus on deficiencies. To get more leverage with your correspondence, be sure to remind employees about the rewards for success as well as consequences for not following through. This permits your message to appeal to the motivational factors employees may experience differently.

■ **How can supervisors refer employees to the EAP earlier to resolve personal problems interfering with job performance? Many employees get referred too late and then there is less chance to nip problems in the bud, before they become unmanageable.**

Viewing the EAP as a means of helping employees resolve **performance** issues and not simply **personal** problems is associated with earlier referrals. It's true that EAPs deal with personal problems. The emergence of an EAP's value within the workplace, however, was based on the supervisor referral mechanism to help employees with persistent performance problems. This is how *more personal problems* are resolved. You will help more employees, reduce turnover, and discover that more employees enter treatment for problems you never suspected, by viewing EAPs as a helpful management tool. This historical rationale continues to be the crucial element of what makes EAPs unique and effective.

■ **My employee has wide mood swings ranging from acting happy and energetic to being sad, quiet, and isolated. The**

A consultation with the employee assistance professional may help you to zero in on behaviors and issues which can be measured, articulated, and documented. Documenting behavioral issues can be difficult because the negative impact on the work situation is not always readily visible. When supervisors witness unusual behavior, a natural response

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problem is that I never can tell whether the “happy” or “sad” employee will show up. Is this bipolar disorder? I am not sure what to document, if anything. Performance appears good.

is often a desire to understand what’s going on and even give a name to the behavior. Although you may feel curious about your employee’s condition, it is very important that you avoid diagnosing. It is not relevant to your responsibilities, may violate employment laws and can potentially make management of the employee issues more complex. Instead, focus on inappropriate performance. Document only observable behavior and its effect on the work situation. An EA professional can help guide you in taking appropriate steps, including consultation with management or HR and may also be able to give helpful suggestions concerning documentation.

■ I have been asked to be less “aggressive” in my communication. Some complain that I am overly critical of employees and that I don’t communicate very well. I admit that I am not the touchy-feely type, but why can’t my style of directness be accepted? Do I need to change my personality?

As a supervisor, you must respond to employees in a way that helps them realize their potential for the benefit of the employee and the agency. There is nothing wrong with being direct, but is your approach working? It appears your communication style may be off-putting. Certainly there are employees who accept a direct and forceful style, but what about others who gain more from a softer approach? Are you willing to make some adjustments? Your communication style is learned. It is likely that you are not aggressive all the time with every person you meet. This indicates that you are capable of “professional use of self.” This is the ability to determine and purposely adapt temporarily to the needs of another person so you can be more effective in the relationship with the person. The EAP can offer suggestions to show you how to employ this useful skill without changing your personality.

■ When employees with performance issues mention their personal problems, I feel obligated to participate in these discussions and offer solutions. It may sound cold, but I want to rid myself of this feeling and be like other supervisors who focus only on performance issues.

Thinking that you are a cold person for not discussing personal problems with your employees is a clue to the importance of overcoming this challenge. Staying focused on what is relevant to work and avoiding personal issues can be difficult if you are accustomed to others relying upon you to support them and solve their problems. It can be even more challenging if you feel satisfied or rewarded for it. Is your awareness about getting too involved a recent development? Have you recognized this struggle in the past, perhaps with other relationships outside of work? The EAP is a good starting point to help you identify the pattern and work toward ridding yourself of this struggle. Your experience is not uncommon. If important relationships in your past, especially in the home, were associated with guilt for not being a “fixer” or if you had responsibility for solving others’ personal problems or preventing them, you could feel obligated now to get involved with employee problems.

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